## Sam Selvon’s *The Lonely Londoners* handout

### Community

Only in […] communication are singular beings given – without a bond *and* without communion, equally distant from any notion of connection or joining from the outside and from any notion of a common and fusional interiority. Communication is the constitutive fact of an exposition to the outside that defines singularity. In its being, as its very being, singularity is exposed to the outside. By virtue of this position or this primordial structure, it is at once detached, distinguished, and communitarian. Community is the presentation of the detachment (or retrenchment) of this distinction that is not individuation, but finitude compearing.

-- Jean-Luc Nancy, ‘The Inoperative Community’, in *The Inoperative Community* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1991)

### Modernist cities

Let us go then, you and I,

 When the evening is spread out against the sky

 Like a patient etherized upon a table;

 Let us go, through certain half-deserted streets,

 The muttering retreats

 Of restless nights in one-night cheap hotels

 And sawdust restaurants with oyster-shells:

 Streets that follow like a tedious argument

 Of insidious intent

 To lead you to an overwhelming question ...

 Oh, do not ask, "What is it?"

 Let us go and make our visit.

 In the room the women come and go

 Talking of Michelangelo.

 The yellow fog that rubs its back upon the window-panes,

 The yellow smoke that rubs its muzzle on the window-panes,

 Licked its tongue into the corners of the evening,

 Lingered upon the pools that stand in drains,

 Let fall upon its back the soot that falls from chimneys,

 Slipped by the terrace, made a sudden leap,

 And seeing that it was a soft October night,

 Curled once about the house, and fell asleep.

[…]

 No! I am not Prince Hamlet, nor was meant to be;

 Am an attendant lord, one that will do

 To swell a progress, start a scene or two,

 Advise the prince; no doubt, an easy tool,

 Deferential, glad to be of use,

 Politic, cautious, and meticulous;

 Full of high sentence, but a bit obtuse;

 At times, indeed, almost ridiculous--

 Almost, at times, the Fool.

-- from T. S. Eliot, ‘The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock’, in *Prufrock and Other Observations* (1917)

The city has always had relations with the society located within it, with its constitutive elements (countryside and agriculture, offensive and defensive powers, political powers, the States, etc.), and with its history. The city changes when the society within it changes. However, the city’s transformations are not the passive results of the global society, nor of its own modifications. The city also relies on (and no less essentially) relations of immediacy, direct connections between the individuals and the groups which make up society (families, organised bodies, professions and corporations); it is no more reducible to the organisation of these immediate connections, than to the metamorphoses in their changing. The city is situated in an inbetween-ness, a mid-way between what one calls the micro-order  – relations of individuals in groups more or less vast, more or less organised and structured, and relations amongst these groups – and the macro-order – that of society, regulated (or not) by the grand institutions (the Church, the State), by a formalised juridical code, and by a ‘culture’ and its significant ensembles.

-- Henri Lefèbvre, *Le droit à la ville* [*The Right to the City*] (1968)

### Memory and the past

Our curiosity about the places in which memory is crystallized, in which it finds refuge, is associated with this specific moment in French history, a turning point in which a sense of rupture with the past is inextricably bound up with a sense that a rift has occurred in memory. But that right has stirred memory sufficiently to raise the question of its embodiment: there are sites, *lieux de mémoire*, in which a residual sense of continuity remains. *Lieux de mémoire* exist because there are no longer any *milieux de mémoire*, settings in which memory is a real part of everyday experience.

[…]

If we still dwelled among our memories, there would be no need to consecrate sites embodying them. *Lieux de mémoire* would not exist, because memory would not have been swept away by history. Every one of our acts, down to the most quotidian, would be experienced in an intimate identification of act and meaning, as a religious repetition of sempiternal practice. With the appearance of ‘the trace,’ of distance and mediation, however, we leave the realm of true memory and enter that of history.

[…]

Memory and history, far from being synonymous, are thus in many respects opposed. Memory is life, always embodied in living societies and as such in permanent evolution, subject to the dialectic of remembering and forgetting, unconscious of the distortions to which it is subject, vulnerable in various ways to appropriation and manipulation, and capable of lying dormant for long periods only to be suddenly reawakened. History, on the other hand, is the reconstruction, always problematic and incomplete, of what is no longer. Memory is always a phenomenon of the present, a bond tying us to the eternal present; history is a representation of the past.

-- Pierre Nora, ‘General Introduction: Between Memory and History’, in *Realms of Memory*, trans. by Arthur Goldhammer, 3 vols, vol. 1 (New York: Columbia University Press, 1996)